

Finding a Mentor

Some of the most valuable professional relationships are found outside your traditional circle of coworkers and friends. Challenge yourself to foster relationships beyond the office and you might develop a productive relationship with a mentor who can help guide your career growth and professional development. Check out the YALI Network blog post [Getting the Most From Your Mentoring Relationship](#) to learn more about mentorship and its benefits. If you decide you would like to pursue such a relationship, it is important to think strategically about how you could use this type of support, and incorporate finding a mentor into your career planning.

Finding a mentor does not necessarily require a formal process, but it does require planning, commitment, and sincerity. A mentor relationship often can grow naturally as you build and strengthen personal connections beyond your existing social circle. Keep reading for tips on finding a mentor, and check out the [YALI Network Mentor Meeting tool](#) for information on getting the most out of your time with your mentor.

1. **Look for formal programs.** Quite a few large companies offer mentorship programs to their employees, so it is worth looking into whether your workplace offers such an opportunity. If not, and you would prefer a structured program rather than a do-it-yourself approach, there are organized groups, such as [Mara Mentor](#), that offer mentorship opportunities. Research online or ask around among your contacts to find additional programs. However, if you are interested in finding a mentor on your own, the following tips will help you!
2. **Build your professional connections.** You never know who might end up being a valuable mentor, so it's worth developing relationships with a variety of people. As those relationships grow, you may find one person in particular that you connect with, and who is interested in supporting your personal and career growth. For more information on developing your network, check out the lesson [Networking to Get Ahead](#) from the YALI Network Online Courses and the [Professional Networking 101](#) blog post.
3. **Use your school connections.** Many people find their first mentor while at university, simply by building close relationships with instructors whose experiences and perspectives they particularly respect. If you are in school or a recent graduate, consider keeping in touch with teachers who may be interested in providing ongoing guidance. Even if you are already long past your university years, there may be an alumni group through which you can find potential mentors.
4. **Look beyond those similar to you.** It can be tempting to find a mentor who is very similar to you, as it can be easier to envision modeling your career after that person's. However, sometimes the most insightful guidance comes from people very dissimilar to you. Think about people of different genders, ethnicities, and even career fields as potential mentors.
5. **Consider multiple mentors.** A singular, main point of contact is valuable when seeking guidance over a long period of time, however, it can be beneficial to include several people with different backgrounds and diverse perspectives as you grow and develop. A wider mentor group makes you better equipped when handling an unexpected or unusual challenge, so you might consider having a range of mentors with whom you engage at different times.
6. **Don't forget about your peers.** Most people think of a mentor as someone older and wiser. However, your peers also can offer unique perspectives on your goals and challenges. Consider forming a peer networking group to tap into this potential.

7. **Pay it forward.** Mentorship only works when people make the decision to share their knowledge and experience with those who could benefit from it, often for little or no concrete benefit to themselves. One of the best ways you can express your appreciation for those who have assisted you, whether in a formal mentorship capacity or by providing more informal guidance, is to support others as they progress through their careers.
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